

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Statement by President Obama on 40th Anniversary of Earth Day

We must continue working to make clean energy economy a reality, he says

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

April 22, 2010

Statement by President Obama on the 40th Anniversary of Earth Day

In 1970, a Senator from Wisconsin named Gaylord Nelson raised his voice and called on every American to take action on behalf of the environment. In the four decades since, millions of Americans have heeded that call and joined together to protect the planet we share.

Since that first Earth Day 40 years ago, we have made immense progress – from the landmark legislation of the 1970s, the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, to the conservation of America’s precious landscapes.

And since taking office, my Administration has worked to build on this progress. We have made a historic investment in clean energy that will not only create the jobs of tomorrow, but will also lay the foundation for long-term economic growth. And we have also renewed our commitment to passing comprehensive energy and climate legislation that will safeguard our planet, spur innovation and allow us to compete and win in the 21st century economy.

Earth Day has always been about people from different backgrounds and different walks of life coming together on behalf of a cause bigger than ourselves. And with that spirit of community, we must continue the hard work to make the dream of a clean energy economy a reality, and pass this world on to our children cleaner and safer than we found it.

Secretary Clinton Says U.S. Will “Never Waver” from Defending NATO Allies

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton repeated the United States’ commitment to defend its allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), vowing that this is a “bedrock principle” from which the country will “never waver.”

Speaking to reporters with Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet in Tallinn, Estonia, April 22, Clinton said it is important for NATO to continue to welcome new

members, and praised Estonia as a model for new democracies all over the world. Clinton was in Estonia for a meeting of NATO foreign ministers.

“Estonia’s experience is a testament to the value that new members bring to NATO,” she said.

“We especially appreciate Estonia’s role in Afghanistan. And we also commend Estonia for working through humanitarian assistance, not only in Afghanistan but in other countries such as Georgia and Moldova,” the secretary said.

Clinton also thanked Estonia for its support, both from its government and from private donors, for disaster relief in Haiti following the country’s January 12 earthquake, and cited that support as “evidence of this country’s generous spirit and commitment to helping others in need.”

Estonia is also “the most connected nation in the world” in terms of technology, Clinton said, and she commended the country for providing technology training to other countries, including Mongolia and Afghanistan.

Asked about Russia’s relationship with former Soviet states, Clinton said no country has “veto power” over others’ membership in organizations such as NATO or the European Union, and added that she is “heartened” to see Europe taking steps to empower itself in its dealings with Russia, including in matters of energy security.

Mindful of the Cold War history, “this is a balancing act,” Clinton said. “We are very conscious of that and we recognize the need to build up our relationships and support actions of independence ... as a way of sending a very clear message that we want to live in a peaceful, stable world with our Russian friends but we’re going to be committed to the defense of our NATO allies.”

Asked about the continued U.S. use of the Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan following the overthrow of its government, Clinton said the Obama administration has been “given assurance” by the country’s new leadership that it would retain access to the base, which has been used to transport U.S. troops and materials to Afghanistan.

The United States has also discussed the issue with Russia, she said, which has been allowing use of its airspace to provide many of the supplies and personnel bound for Afghanistan through the Manas Air Base.

Reports of Syrian Arms Transfers to Hizballah Raise Concerns

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says the United States is concerned by reports that suggest Syria is transferring arms to the Iranian-backed Hizballah militia group in Lebanon. She also said the return of a U.S. ambassador to Damascus would improve communication between Syria and the United States.

Speaking to reporters in Tallinn, Estonia, April 22, ahead of a meeting of NATO foreign ministers, Clinton said the United States has expressed “in the strongest terms possible” to the Syrian government concerns about stories that “there has been some transfer of weapons technology into Syria with the potential purpose of then later transferring it to Hizballah inside Lebanon.”

At the same time, the proposed U.S. Senate confirmation of Robert Ford as U.S. ambassador to Syria should not be seen as “some kind of reward” to Syria, she said. Ford’s nomination has been approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and is awaiting action by the full Senate.

The United States intends to continue pushing its concerns with the Syrian government on issues such as the Middle East conflict and Syria’s role in Lebanon. “We think having an ambassador there adds to the ability to convey that message strongly, and hopefully, influence behavior in Syria,” the secretary said.

The State Department issued an April 19 statement condemning the transfer of any arms from Syria to Hizballah, particularly SCUD ballistic missiles, saying such transfers could destabilize the region by posing threats both to Israel’s security and Lebanon’s sovereignty.

The statement said all states are obliged under U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701 “to prevent the importation of any weapons into Lebanon except as authorized by the Lebanese Government,” and said Syria’s designation by the United States as a state sponsor of terrorism is “directly related to its support for terrorist groups,” including Hizballah.

The statement said Syria’s deputy chief of mission in Washington, Zouheir Jabbour, had been summoned to the State Department April 19 “to review Syria’s provocative behavior concerning the potential transfer of arms,” the fourth occasion in recent months when U.S. officials have raised these concerns with Syria.

In his April 21 testimony before the House of

Representatives’ Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman cited conversations he and other U.S. officials had with Syrian Ambassador to the United States Imad Moustapha on February 26, March 1 and March 10 expressing concern over “information we had that Syria was passing increasingly sophisticated ballistic weapons to Hizballah.”

He described the reports as “a serious allegation.” If they are proven to be accurate, “Syria has made a mistake,” he said.

“But the trouble is, it’s not just Syria that pays for the consequences of Syria’s mistakes when we’re talking about this volatile region,” Feltman said.

The assistant secretary argued that while Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is in constant contact with Iran and groups such as Hizballah and Hamas, “he needs to be able to hear from us directly and continually as well,” and urged Ford’s confirmation as ambassador.

“When President Assad is taking decisions that could affect war and peace in his region, he needs to have a clear understanding of what the implications are, what the U.S. positions are, what the red lines are,” Feltman said.

Feltman identified areas where Syria and the United States can work together, welcoming Syria’s efforts to shut down some of the pipelines previously used by foreign fighters to enter Iraq, as well as its hosting of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees who receive health care and education from the Syrian government.

He pointed out that, unlike Iran, Syria has repeatedly stated that a comprehensive peace in the Middle East is in its interests and has pursued several rounds of negotiations with Israel.

U.S. Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell has been working on bridging the gap between Israel and Syria to get a new round of talks started, Feltman said.

“We have differences in how they want to start, but both sides do want to start,” he said.

Syria’s actions “fall far short of its words in favor of peace in the region and [a] stable and prosperous Iraq,” Feltman said.

“Our job is to show them that it’s in their interest to have the words that they say about living in peace in the region matched by their actions,” he said.

Finance Ministers Announce \$880 Million for Global Food Security

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Finance ministers from the United States, Canada, Spain and South Korea and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation pledged \$880 million for a new food security fund to tackle world hunger and poverty.

“As we work to build a stronger, more stable and balanced global economy, we must renew our commitment to tackle global hunger and poverty,” U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said April 22. “A global economy where more than 1 billion people suffer from hunger is not a sustainable one.”

The fund — the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program — includes a U.S. commitment of \$475 million and pledges of \$230 million from Canada, \$95 million from Spain, \$50 million from South Korea and \$30 million from the private Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. President Obama committed \$67 million to the new global fund and requested \$408 million in the fiscal 2011 federal budget.

“With the global number of chronically hungry reaching 1 billion, working together to put an end to the status quo and improve on past efforts is both a moral and economic imperative,” U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said at the announcement April 22. “The financial commitments to the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program announced today will help address this critical issue in a meaningful and comprehensive way.”

The fund was established to respond to a call by the Group of 20 (G20) advanced and emerging economies for the World Bank to work with interested donors to set up a trust fund. The fund is designed to implement \$22 billion in pledges made by the Group of Eight (G8) advanced economies at their 2009 summit in L’Aquila, Italy.

Bill Gates, co-chair of the U.S.-based Gates Foundation, told reporters that investing in small farmers historically was an effective way to combat hunger and extreme poverty.

“The launch of this fund is an important step forward, but only a first step. Other countries meeting at the European, G8 and G20 summits in June and at the U.N. [General Assembly] in September should join the four founding partners and make good on their pledges,” Gates said.

The World Bank has estimated that the sudden increase in food prices in 2008 drove at least 100 million people into poverty worldwide. The surge in food prices caused food riots that threatened to topple dozens of governments

across the world and create political chaos for many regions. Even before the spike in food prices, 850 million people in poorer countries were chronically malnourished.

World Bank President Robert Zoellick said the food crisis continues to put a severe economic burden on developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

“Agriculture, seen as vital for development, has also been affected by low levels of investment over the past few decades and issues like climate change,” according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The new global fund has both private- and public-sector accounts to provide financing to countries that have robust farming strategies. The public-sector account will provide aid for creating better irrigation systems, linking farmers to markets and building harvest-storage infrastructure. The private-sector account will provide financing to increase the commercial value of small and medium-sized agri-businesses and farmers, according to the Treasury Department.

The World Bank announced that the African Development Bank, the World Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development will implement projects that are financed by the new global fund.

“Malnutrition and hunger afflicts millions of vulnerable people in Africa who cannot afford to grow and buy sufficient food,” African Union Commission Chairman Jean Ping said. “The establishment of this fund is an important signal that donors intend to meet their commitments and help African countries implement their comprehensive agriculture strategies.”

The finance ministers were in Washington to attend the G20 finance ministers’ meeting before the annual spring meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank April 24–25.

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